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ABSTRACT

The paper describes practical strategies to support the integration of children with disabilities into regular classes. Modifications in the classroom that facilitate integration include individualized instructional methods, use of the Adaptive Learning Environments Model, cooperative learning strategies, heterogeneous grouping within the classroom, social skills training, curriculum-based assessment, ecological problem solving through consultation with the regular teacher, a clear decision-making process, peer tutoring, an integration facilitator, class sponsorship, and buddying. (DB)

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Integration—How Can We Make It Work?

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Abstract

Returning exceptional students into an unchanged, inflexible, nonadaptive, inefficient, and ineffective classroom environment with the teacher's aide acting as an adjunct to the traditional school and classroom structure is an over-simplified solution to integration. The purpose of this paper is to describe strategies that can be used to support the practical application of integration.

Successful Integration

Successful integration of special needs children is not dependent on the degree of handicap inherent in the individual, but on many factors external to the individual. The Canadian Association for Community Living (Porter, 1986) has cited four interdependent strategic factors necessary for success: political will, a shared set of values, instructional supports and strategies, and practical application. This paper focuses on a variety of instructional supports and strategies available to the classroom teacher. A more detailed discussion of the topic is found in Skakun (1987).

Modifications in the Classroom that Facilitate Integration: Instructional Supports and Strategies

If the needs of the exceptional student are not being met in the regular classroom, in addition to preparing *every* teacher to teach the special needs child, we must adapt, modify, and restructure the setting until the needs are met (Stainback, Stainback, Courtnage & Jaben, 1985). Educators at all levels, policy-makers, parents, and advocates need to be aware of the theoretical knowledge base that supports the practical application of integration. In the following section is a list and brief description of a number of different modifications and strategies that can be employed.

Individualized instructional methods. This strategy is:

> instructional programming designed to accommodate for specific educational characteristics and needs on a per student basis. Such programming is criterion based; instructional objectives, pacing, and materials are selected according to their appropriateness to the individual student rather than norm-referenced or

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> selected in accordance with the expected average for the student's peer group. (Stainback et al., 1985, p. 146)

The Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) is the framework from which parents, teachers, specialists, and paraprofessionals share the responsibility of educating the exceptional child. Although individualization is a fundamental part of the Individualized Educational Plan (Strain & Kerr, 1981), requiring that IEPs be prepared does not guarantee that individualized instructional methods will be employed. If teachers do not have the knowledge and the experience to use individualized instructional methods, then writing IEPs is of little benefit to the child.

Adaptive Learning Environments Model (ALEM). In the Adaptive Learning Environments Model (Reynolds & Wang, 1983; Wang & Birch, 1984; Wang & Walberg, 1983) the assumption is:

> that students learn in different ways and at different rates and as a result, effective school programs require both the inclusion of a variety of instructional techniques and learning experiences that match the needs of each student and the allocation of adequate amounts of time for all students to learn. (Wang & Walberg, 1983, p. 604)

Through adaptive instruction regular students, students with mild to moderate handicaps, and the academically gifted can have their educational needs met. Adaptive instruction is facilitated through individualized progress plans, a diagnostic-prescriptive monitoring system, and a self-schedule system. The two components of the ALEM's individualized progress plans consist of a mastery of academic skills through a highly structured prescriptive learning component and an exploratory component that encourages social and personal development.

In the ALEM each child is provided an individualized program that is dependent on the child's strengths and needs. Instruction is based on the student's curriculum needs, not on a categorical label. Self-management skills are taught to allow the learner to take responsibility for his/her learning (Wang & Birch, 1984).

Effective implementation of the ALEM has led to positive academic and attitudinal outcomes. Research indicates that academic achievement of students in the ALEM program is greater than that of similar students in self-contained special education classes. Decertification (removal of the handicapped classification) was recommended for about 30% of the mainstreamed students in ALEM classes, compared to only 3% of the students with similar special education classification in the self-contained special education context (Wang, n.d.). Self-esteem and social competence of the handicapped students in ALEM classes is reported as higher than that of students in self-contained special educa-

tion classes (Wang, n.d.). Over time, major changes take place in classroom processes. Some of these changes include peer interaction that is constructive, a high rate of on-task behavior, and an increased frequency of teacher-pupil interaction for instructional purposes (Wang & Birch, 1984).

Cooperative learning strategies. All members in the group reach a common goal together through working in a cooperative effort. Structuring the classroom to provide cooperative learning and playing experiences promotes social acceptance, whereas competitive and individual learning and playing experiences promote rejection and lack of acceptance (Johnson & Johnson, 1980; Johnson & Johnson, 1986; McGill, 1984).

> Cooperative learning should be used whenever teachers want students to learn more, like school better, like each other better, have higher self-esteem, and learn more effective social skills. (Johnson & Johnson, 1986, p. 554)

The four basic elements of cooperative learning experiences are positive interdependence, individual accountability, collaborative skills, and group processing (Johnson & Johnson, 1986). Small heterogeneous groups of children work together at their own pace and level to complete the group goal. The cooperative goal structure requires that students use collaborative skills such as leadership, decision-making, trust-building, communication, and conflict-management skills (Johnson & Johnson, 1986). The final element is an evaluation of how well the group worked together to achieve its academic goals.

Heterogeneous grouping within the classroom. Grouping children into permanent ability groups disregards the students' individuality and uniqueness. Whether students are so grouped in a classroom or placed in a special class, the school system is perpetuating the *caste* system of the valued and devalued (Bartoli, 1986; Cochrane, Cochrane, Scalena, & Buchanan, 1985). In the holistic concept of language arts, teachers encourage learning through cooperative heterogeneous groupings (Bartoli, 1986; Cochrane et al., 1985). "It seems clear from the research that we should not be supportive of efforts to stereotype, segregate, label, and track children" (Bartoli, 1986, p. 21).

Social skills training. Placing exceptional students in integrated settings does not guarantee increased social interaction or social acceptance (Gresham, 1982). Inadequate social skills in children result in a clear pattern of social acceptance-rejection (Strain & Kerr, 1981). Currently there is enough evidence to suggest that social skills training with exceptional children (Gresham, 1982; Madden & Slavin, 1983; Meyer, McQuarter & Kishi, 1985; Strain & Odom, 1986) helps them to interact more positively and become better accepted by their nonhandicapped

peers (Gresham, 1982; Madden & Slavin, 1983). The strategies employed to facilitate social skills training are peer tutoring (Strain & Odom, 1986), teacher modeling and peer modeling through use of film (Gresham, 1982), and instructional programming. In addition to modeling, Gresham (1982) includes manipulation of antecedents and manipulation of consequences as effective social skills training techniques. In manipulation of antecedents nonhandicapped peers respond to students initiating play. Other strategies include role playing and acting out of familiar stories. Cooperative games also increase social interaction and peer acceptance. In manipulation of consequences, students displaying appropriate social behavior receive praise, or an appropriate reinforcement.

Curriculum-based assessment. This instructional strategy (Galagan, 1985; Gickling & Thompson, 1985; Rosenfield & Rubinson, 1985; Tucker, 1985) is "a procedure for determining the instructional needs of a student based on the student's ongoing performance in existing course content" (Tucker, 1985, p. 200).

This strategy matches the curriculum to the students' skills allowing sufficient time for learning (Gickling & Thompson, 1985). Through curriculum-based assessment the individual differences of a more diverse student population can be met.

Ecological problem solving through consultation to regular teacher. Traditionally, educators focus on the child when a problem occurs. In the ecological problem-solving approach (Cantrell & Cantrell, 1980), the child is part of an ecosystem that requires an analysis of the interaction between the child and the environment. Ecological discordance occurs when the child's skill level is above or below the expected demands made of the child in the environment. In the analysis of the problem the child's home, school, church, peer, and other environments are included in identifying the behavioral, academic, and other problems of the child. After the ecological discordances have been identified, the problem solving approach requires a mapping of intervention resources and strategies. To capture these decision-making procedures used by the professionals, flowcharting techniques are adapted. Support teachers, extensively trained in ecological analysis and intervention, provide consultation and support to the regular teachers on an extended and continuous basis to support and maintain the exceptional child in the regular setting.

This strategy has reduced the number of student referrals, resulted in higher student achievement and lower frequency of disruptive behavior as well as increased teacher ratio of praise to criticism (Cantrell & Cantrell, 1980).

The decision-making process. To maintain a child in the integrated setting when a problem occurs, whether it is academic or social, steps need to be taken to resolve the problem. In the decision-making process the problem and the probable agents for change are identified (Heron, 1978). A resolution to the problem can be made by focusing on the child's behavior, the peer group's behavior, or the teacher's behavior. If the child's learning environment has been personalized so that individual differences are accommodated through appropriate instructional strategies and the problem persists, then other probable change agents need to be investigated (Heron, 1978). Strategies used to increase and improve peer interaction can be an important change agent resolving the problem. Teachers also need to consider how a change in their behavior can be a solution for the identified problem.

Peer tutoring. Classwide peer tutoring increases the engaged time spent in learning and is a positive intervention strategy in improving student achievement outcomes (Delquadri, Greenwood, Whorton, Carta & Hall, 1986; Strain & Odom, 1986). Although peer tutoring has had positive effects with students having mild handicaps, the focus of peer interaction with students with severe handicaps should not only be that of teacher and caregiver, but should provide ways for partners of unequal status to interact in a reciprocal and complementary way (Brinker & Thorpe, 1984).

Integration facilitator. The integration facilitator (Ruttimann & Forest, 1986) intercedes between the child and the environment on behalf of the child with severe handicaps to promote social, developmental, and educational outcomes in school and in the community. Through the initiative of the integration facilitator, a close network of peers is built to share the responsibility of maintaining the child with special needs in the educational setting as well as interacting socially at school, at home, and in the community.

Class sponsorship. Another class sponsors a child with severe handicaps to participate in some of its school activities, special excursions, and special occasions (Brown, 1986).

Buddying. When students with severe handicaps are learning together with nonhandicapped students one of the strategies employed for increased social interaction is buddying (Stainback & Stainback, 1985; Taylor & Ferguson, 1985). A child with a handicap and a child without a handicap are paired for extracurricular and nonacademic activities.

Children with Challenging Needs: An Integral Part of Effective Education

The ultimate goal in education is to have a unified, reformed, and restructured educational system that serves the unique needs of every

child and that enables the attainment of one's ultimate potential within every neighborhood school. The recent movement of applying the current knowledge base and research of effective education to reforming and reorganizing the school, the classroom, and instruction is pertinent to both regular and special education (Bickel & Bickel, 1986). It challenges the old assumption of the need of regular and special education. Stainback and Stainback (1984) have proposed a merger of general and special education to better meet the needs of all students. Three required changes to our school structure that would allow for more flexibility include "a nongraded grouping arrangement, variable pacing and time requirements for learning, and evaluation and programming based on individual student and achievement levels" (Stainback et al., 1985, p. 148). Within effective learning environments, instruction, program adaptations, and intervention strategies employed are dependent on individual learning styles and individual learning time. Integration can best be promoted within effective learning environments; as in schools and classrooms exemplary of effective instruction, the uniqueness and individuality of every child is respected. In effect it is not enough to lobby for integration, but policy makers, administrators, educators, advocates, and parents must be instrumental in creating effective education that increases academic learning time and promotes the development of the whole child within a flexible and adaptive system. Continued stagnation and the perpetuation of an outdated mode of education can only perpetuate the underdevelopment of our human resources.

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